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DESERT CROSSROADS

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Bureau of Land Management

SALT LAKE DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Basin is a harsh, unforgiving, but yet extremely delicate wild land, which became a crossroads in the development of the West. Brave American pioneers took months to cross the vast expanse of the continent, which eventually passed through the desert wilderness that now is part of Utah. Today, these desert crossroads can be traveled in a matter of hours.

From exploration and trade, to travel, settlement and communications, this land has had episodes of the American West etched in its mountains and deserts. The Pony Express became the great breakthrough for communication by shortening the months it once took to deliver mail to six days from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California. Communications now move at the speed of light.

The triumph of man and eventually his technology over the Great Basin is one of the most fascinating, and revealing, sagas in our history. Many historic events took place on what is now Public Land managed for you by the Salt Lake District, Bureau of Land Management. This brochure is intended to help you enjoy, understand and relive our fascinating heritage.

THE SETTING

Northwestern Utah is a unique and conspicuous part of the renowned Great Basin. Zenas Leonard, a member of Joe Walker's 1834 expedition to California, leaves us one of the earliest definitions of the Great Basin:

> *This desert (the Great Basin) which had presented such an insurmountable barrier to our route, is bounded on the east by the Rocky Mountains, on the west by the California mountains (the Sierras), on the north by the Columbia river (drainage), and on the south by the Red, or Colorado river (drainage) . . . There are numerous small rivers rising in either mountain, winding their way far . . . where they are emptied into lakes or reservoirs, and the water sinks in the sands.*

Lying in the northwestern portion of the Great Basin is the Great Salt Lake and its associated mountains and the Great Salt Desert. These mountains, the desert and lake constitute formidable barriers to travel and hostile regions to habitation. High snow-capped mountains border on the east. To the west are the barren flats and tall ranges of western Utah and the Nevada border. In between these, lies the bitter Great Salt Lake, phenomenon of the West. These features and a climate of hot, dry summers and cold, snowy winters, comprise a harsh environment which presents a formidable challenge to man.

Many groups of people took up that challenge, but strikingly, they did so differently. Among these challengers were peculiarities both personal and cultural. Indian foragers, white farmers, Indian fighters, trappers, preachers and developers, ambitious men, rich and poor -- all came here. Although much of this past is now lost, there are important things which remain. Through careful studies of the few precious fragments of the past that we together preserve, the past is present, for all to enjoy.

INDIAN PEOPLE

Equated with the paleo-Indian tradition, big game hunters first entered the Great Basin perhaps 15,000 years ago. Migratory subsistence in a rather harsh environment was dependent upon the gathering of wild

plants and hunting such large game species as the now extinct mammoth. Scientific knowledge of this era, terminating about 8,000 years ago, is limited.

Around 10,000 years ago a marked climatic change brought about a drier weather cycle and a changing environment. Subsistence patterns and a cultural tradition now identified as the Archaic period (which continued until about 500 A.D.) developed. Still nomadic, these people endured thousands of years, hunting small game and gathering an impressive array of wild plants.

Significant technological advancement were made by the aborigines by about 550 A.D. -- bows and arrows, pottery and limited agriculture. These traits distinguish Utah's Fremont people from the former Archaic cultural tradition. However, these aborigines mysteriously disappeared around 1300 A.D. Archaeologists believe the long cultural saga ended partially due to drier conditions as well as overutilization and depletion of the natural resources.

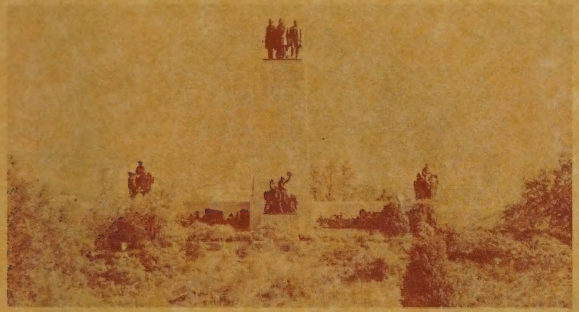
The Shoshoni Indian culture of the southern Great Basin entered what now is Utah -- perhaps by chance -- about the time the Fremont disappeared. Long adapted to a dry environment, these people were well suited for northwestern Utah, reverting to the nomadic hunting-gathering tradition. They may have been the forefathers of the Ute, Goshute, and Bannock Indian nations.

Within a few decades of the white man's arrival, Indian cultures were decimated and their land appropriated. Remnants of their past are the only reminders of their achievements.

WALKER 1833
RENDEZVOUS 1826
1827
GREAT SALT LAKE
JEDEDIAH SMITH
OGDEN'S HOLE
1826
SMITH 1826
DOMINQUEZ-ESCALANTE 1776
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

EARLY TRAVELERS AND MOUNTAIN MEN

The earliest white travelers in the Great Basin did not challenge its saline waters, salt desert and rugged mountains. Rather, they skirted its edges.



"This is the Place Monument," a tribute to early travelers in the area

The Dominguez-Escalante expedition of 1776 passed through eastern Utah and entered the valley of Utah Lake before turning south in search of a new overland route to California's Spanish Monterey. Subsequent Spanish activities in central and northern Utah were few and sporadic, but their routes skirted perhaps both sides of the Wasatch Mountains as evidenced by the Spanish goods Captain Lewis of the 1805 Lewis and Clark expedition noted among central Idaho's Lemhi Shoshoni Indians.

Following these early activities, American, English and Spanish fur trappers were the next people to brush up against the barrier-lands of the Great Basin. In 1824, a company of bold men employed by William Ashley and Andrew Henry Fur Company wintered along the Bear River in Cache Valley. A few members of the party, led by the famous mountainman Jim Bridger, descended to the river and discovered an immense body of water they believed to be the Pacific Ocean.

One year later, Peter Skene Ogden's party of Hudson Bay Company trappers entered the region and noted a large lake 100 miles long. The journals of Ogden's trip are the earliest known written descriptions of northern Utah. The elusive Etienne Provost, for whom the Utah city of Provo is named, operated out of Taos, New Mexico and also was known to have been in the vicinity of the Great Salt Lake during the mid-1820s.

The task of actually penetrating the vast wastelands of northwestern Utah fell to the most famous of all mountainmen -- Jedediah Strong Smith.

Escalante enters Utah Valley

Following a party of American Trappers and their perilous and unsuccessful search for furs along the northern edge of the lake in early 1826, Jedediah Smith led 17 men along the Wasatch Mountains. On his journey he crossed the Great Basin, reached Spanish California and returned with two companions via a route across the southern part of the Great Salt Lake Desert. On the trip back, the trio nearly perished. After crossing Donner Pass in deep snow, they then plunged into dry valleys and rocky hills. Upon crossing the southern end of Utah's Deep Creek Mountains, one member collapsed, later to be saved by Smith who returned with water.

Those who may chance to read this at a distance from the scene may perhaps be surprised that the sight of this lake surrounded by a wilderness of more than 2,000 miles diameter excited in me those feelings known to the traveler, who, after long and perilous journeying, comes again in view of his home. But so it was with me for I had traveled so much in the vicinity of the Salt Lake that it had become my home of the wilderness.

(Jedediah Smith)

By 1830 Smith had completed his second Great Basin expedition and Ogden had finished a similar journey. An era came to an end. Smith convinced serious American trappers to hunt beaver east of the Rockies where they could be found in great numbers. The flurry of furring passed, causing men to challenge Utah's barrier lands for new reasons.

One such man was Captain Benjamin Bonneville. Although Bonneville did little exploring of Utah himself, his lieutenant, the knowledgeable mountain man Joe Walker, led a pioneering expedition of 1833. They crossed northern Utah to California and returned the following season to the Bear River area via Idaho's Fort Hall on a route which became part of the California Trail. The crossing of northwestern Utah and Nevada was so difficult it was not again attempted for nearly a decade.

BARTLESON - BIDWELL 1841
1843
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
FREMONT 1845
FREMONT 1845
1844
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

EXPLORERS AND EMIGRANTS

From out of the East came a most hardy wagon train of California-bound emigrants -- the Bartleson-Bidwell party. Leaving the Oregon Trail near Soda Springs, Idaho in the summer of 1841, they struck a route south to Utah and southwest across the barrier lands. Enduring great hardship, they traveled a route to California which no other emigrants were to follow. They accomplished several firsts: the first mother and daughter to cross the continent to California; the first wagon train to cross Utah; the first known white people to drink from Pilot Peak Spring (where they abandoned their wagons) and the first white females known to have crossed Utah and Nevada.

The early and mid-1840s also were noted for Captain John C. Fremont's government explorations. The "Great Pathfinder" led four western expeditions that were the first attempts at scientifically investigating the Great Basin. Fremont measured the salinity of the Great Salt Lake and mapped the surrounding area and named Pilot Peak.

John Charles Fremont

CALIFORNIA TRAIL
SALT LAKE CUTOFF
BRYANT
RUSSEL
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
PILOT SPRING
H Y
B–R
D–R
DONNER – REED
HARLAN – YOUNG
HASTINGS CUTOFF 1846
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

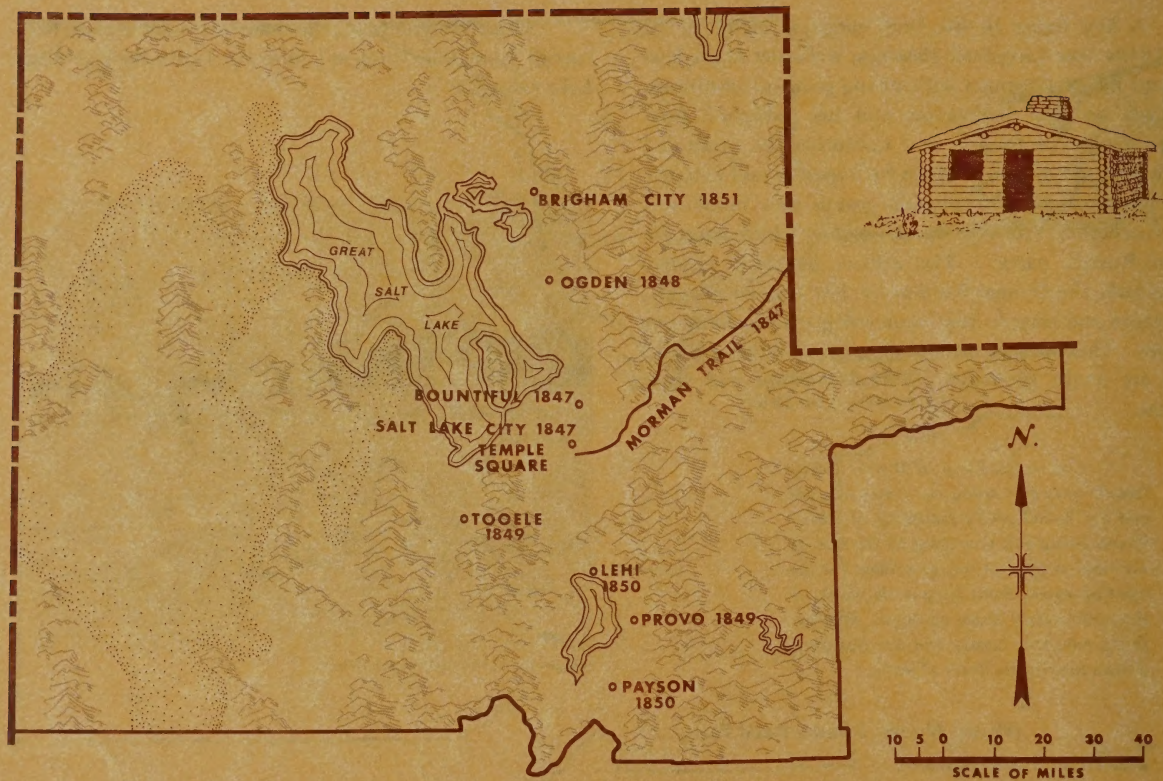
A key figure in the Utah emigrant travel of the mid-1840s was Langsford Hastings, a former Ohio lawyer and new Californian with strong political ambitions. Through personal persuasion and his published Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California, he promoted a short-cut to California which he hoped would enhance his reputation. Several emigrant groups were lured onto the treacherous Hastings Cutoff, among which were the Bryant-Russell party. The efforts of these groups, particularly the Donner-Reed party, left sagas of struggle, endurance and tragedy that soon eulogized the American pioneer. Their wagon ruts through the waterless salt and mud are mute reminders of their passage and their failures.

Got to the Rock of Misery (Crater Island) sixty-five miles, our water all gone and our horses nearly famishing of water. Teams giving out, men lying by the side of the road in the hot sun speechless for the want of water. Some lying in the shade of the rocks nearly dying of thirst. Men offering one, ten, twenty and five hundred dollars for a single drink of water.

(Henry Bloom, Donner-Reed Party)

Other emigrants wisely chose the route around the barrier lands, the Oregon-California Trail and the Salt Lake Cutoff.

Wagon tracks through the salt desert.


BRIGHAM CITY 1851
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
OGDEN 1848
MORMAN TRAIL 1847
BOUNTIFUL 1847
SALT LAKE CITY 1847
TEMPLE
SQUARE
TOOELE
1849
LEHI
1850
PROVO 1849
PAYSON
1850
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

SETTLERS AND DEVELOPERS

On the tracks of the Donner-Reed party came the most significant development in Utah history -- the 1847 arrival of Mormon settlers. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), seeking a land in which to freely practice their religion, studied the valley of the Great Salt Lake and were prepared to live with the blessings and brutality of its lands.

From the trails they blazed to the remote settlements they established and to the cities they built, the Mormon pioneers left indelible landmarks that portray their tenacity and desire for a place to call their own. By the time of Brigham Young's death in 1877, more than 300 Mormon settlements in the six western states and Hawaii were established.

Brigham Young

STANSBURY
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
STANSBURY
1849–50
JOHNSTON'S ARMY
BECKWITH
SIMPSON
BECKWITH
BECKWITH 1853
1859
CAMP
FLOID
SIMPSON
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

GOVERNMENT EXPLORATION

In 1849, two years after the coming of the Mormons, the first of a number of survey parties entered Utah's barrier lands. Led by Captain Howard Stansbury, this party conducted "trigonometrical and nautical surveys of the Great Salt Lake." To Dr. James Blake, Stansbury's scientific advisor, belongs the distinction of being the first man to realize that the Great Salt Lake was a remnant of a larger, ancient lake.

Two other distinguished survey parties traveled Utah's barrier lands in the 1850s: the Gunnison-Beckwith and J. H. Simpson parties. Gunnison, who had worked with Stansbury, was engaged to lead a survey party seeking a Pacific Railroad route. En route to winter quarters at Salt Lake City, John Gunnison and several of his men were slain by Indians and command passed to Lieutenant E. G. Beckwith.

Following the arrival of Colonel A. S. Johnston's army in the Utah territory and the establishment of Camp Floyd in Cedar Valley in 1858, Captain J. S. Simpson of the Corps of Topographical Engineers was dispatched to survey a new road from Camp Floyd east to Fort Bridger and west to Carson Valley. Portions of the 1859 trail scouted by Simpson were already in use by the overland travelers. This general route west was used sporadically through the decade, but with the increased stage, mail and Pony Express activities, the trail developed into a major route: the South-Central Overland Trail.

J. H. Simpson Party crossing the salt desert

GREAT
SALT
LAKE
OVERLAND
CHORPHENNING TRAIL
WEBER
ECHO CANYON
EAST CANYON
MOUNTAIN DELL
SALT LAKE HOUSE
TRAVELERS REST
ROCKWELL
DUGOUT
CAMP FLOYD
RUSH VALLEY
PASS
POINT LOOKOUT
SIMPSON SPRINGS
RIVER BED
WILLOW CREEK
CANYON
DEEP CREEK
SOUTH - CENTRAL
PONY EXPRESS
STATIONS
1860 – 1861
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

OVERLAND TRAILS

George Chorpenning first developed this overland trail, established roads and stage stops. In 1860 the founders of the Pony Express acquired Chorpenning's government mail contract, expanded existing facilities and ushered in a dramatic 18 months of the Pony Express riders.

> *Here he comes!*
> *Every neck is stretched further, and every eye strained wider. Away across the endless dead level of the prairie a black speck appears against the sky, and it is plain that it moves. Well, I should think so! In a second or two it becomes a horse and the rider, rising nearer -- growing more and more defined -- nearer and nearer, and the flutter of hoofs comes faintly to the ear -- another instant a shout and a hurrah from our own upper deck, a wave of the rider's hand, but no reply, and a man and horse burst past our excited faces, and go winging away like a belated fragment of a storm!*
>
> (Mark Twain)

With the completion in Salt Lake of the first transcontinental telegraph line in late 1861, the Pony Express died quickly. However, the South-Central Overland route endured as telegraph poles and stations marked a trail formerly used by horsemen and stagecoaches.

> *And on to River Bed Station, where we got the last water, except what we carried with us . . . On we rode, still along the barren levels and over mountain cut-off, to the plain again . . . We reached the breakfast station at Deep Creek. Our fare here was rigidly frugal, but the assurance of a good dinner at Schell Creek, fifty miles distant, comforted us.*
>
> (Gould, an 1868 traveler)

Reconstructed Simpson Springs Pony Express Station

Today this trail may be driven in the comfort of an automobile. Travelers are advised to carefully consider their gasoline and water stops in remote areas.

LA PLATA
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
CAMP DOUGLAS
SALDURO
PARK CITY
JACOB CITY
BINGHAM
BINGHAM
COPPER
MINE
MERCUR
SUNSHINE
CAMP FLOYD
AJAX
GOLD
HILL
TOPLIFT
CLIFTON
SCRANTON
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

PICKS AND SHOVELS

The passing of the rhythmic drama of the Pony Express riders perhaps marked the end of an era. While men and horses remained, the ideas of a modern age were budding. In place of pony riders stood the vanguard of an electronic age -- the whispering wires of the first continental telegraph line.

The 1860s also witnessed two other new barrier land challengers: The beginning of mining activities and the coming of a machine -- the iron horse -- which would penetrate the harshest climates to tie the West to the East.

Approximately 750 army troopers under the command of Colonel Patrick Conners were sent to the Utah Territory in 1862 to guard the overland trails west of Fort Bridger. These "Soldiers of the Overland," stationed at Salt Lake City's Camp Douglas, became Utah's first productive prospectors, finding such minerals as gold, silver, lead and copper. Other miners quickly followed.

Building the telegraph

Although Utah possesses an abundant and diverse wealth of minerals, mining did not become a viable economic force until the early 1870s, some 20-25 years after most of the surrounding states. This was because of the Mormon church's policy of discouraging prospecting and mining by its members. However, active prospecting began in 1862 by members of the California Volunteers stationed in Salt Lake City to protect the immigrant trails running through northern Utah. In 1863, the first mining claims in the state were located for lead carbonate in Bingham Canyon. Gold placers were discovered there the following year. In quick succession, gold, silver, copper, lead and zinc were discovered in the Park City-Cottonwood-American Fork districts southeast of Salt Lake City, Ophir-Mercur-Camp Floyd-Tintic districts southwest of Salt Lake City, and the Gold Hill-Clifton-Willow Springs districts in extreme southwest Tooele County. Several of these early mining areas are active today (Bingham-Tintic-Park City-Gold Hill).

Mercur in its hay-day 1902

Bingham copper pit

Even with the widespread mineral discoveries, mine production did not occur in significant amounts until 1869 when the transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory, Utah. The railroad enabled ore from the mines to be shipped to California for smelting. For example, in 1868, Utah produced about 2000 ounces of silver, but by 1872, production was more than 100,000 ounces.

Although Utah ranks third in the nation in total output of silver and sixth in gold, it is copper that most people associate with the state. This is because the largest open pit copper mine in the world, the Bingham copper pit, lies about 10 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Originally begun as underground mines for silver, lead, and gold, the Bingham property was converted in 1906 to open pit mining to capitalize on the abundant, widespread but low concentration copper mineralization.

TRANSCONTINENTAL
Kelton
GOLDEN SPIKE
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
PACIFIC
CENTRAL
Terrace
Watercress
Corinne
Lucin
LUCIN CUTOFF
GREAT
SALT
LAKE
UNION PACIFIC
CENTRAL UTAH
Salt Lake City
WESTERN PACIFIC
Garfield
UTAH WESTERN
Stocton
DEEP CREEK R.R.
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

Near Promontory Point, Utah

THE RAILROAD THROUGH UTAH

Northwestern Utah, serving as the meeting place for the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads, had an exciting railroad history. Competition between these two companies escalated as their east-west lines neared each other, resulting in casualties and repeated incidents of violence. New boom towns -- such as Terrace, with its large Chinese population -- were quickly founded. The king of all Utah railroad towns was, however, Corinne:

> *Nineteen saloons paid license for three months. Two dancehalls amused elegant leisure of the evening hours, and the supply of "sports" was fully equal to the requirements of a railroad town.*
>
> (J. H. Beable, newspaperman)

After the driving of the Golden Spike and the opening of the railroad, additional railroad routes were built. Some of these routes were a spur to Salt Lake City, a Salt Lake to Garfield route, a spur to Stockton, a 1902 cut-off to Lucin and Western Pacific's lines to Nevada and Gold Hill mines. The Lucin cut-off provided a direct route across Great Salt Lake to the springs of the Lucin area and dealt a blow to the original route and its associated towns around the northern end of the Salt Lake. The fallen town structures and railless roadbeds of the original transcontinental railroad remain as mute reminders of the hurried life which once centered around this historic route west, of which Promontory is now a landmark in the National Register of Historic Places.

GREAT SALT LAKE

BONNEVILLE RACEWAY

VICTORY HIGHWAY

SALTAIR RACEWAY 1913

LINCOLN HIGHWAY

HIGHWAY

FLINT HIGHWAY

LINCOLN HIGHWAY

N.

10 5 0 10 20 30 40

SCALE OF MILES

THE RACEWAY

Following the iron horse west to challenge the barrier land was another of man's most permanent landmarks. In 1910 a number of influential people pooled their resources to promote the nation's first transcontinental highway. The Lincoln Highway entered Utah from Evanston, Wyoming, passed south of the Great Salt Lake (bent south to Iosepa, a Mormon colony of Polynesian converts, if snows closed the Tooele Valley's Johnson's Pass route) amd crossed the Salt Desert to Nevada by either a northern or southern route. Until 1927 the highway was used by "adventuresome motorists."

Daring motorists of the era also were beginning to venture onto the salt desert in search of speed. In 1914, Teddy Tetzleff managed a 141.73 mph world record. In 1935 Sir Malcolm Campbell became the first human to surpass the 300 mph barrier. Campbell, a wealthy Britisher, was one of the first individuals to bring notoriety to the Salt Flats. Later, Ab Jenkins, a native Utahn, gave the area additional publicity. Jenkins ran his Mormon Meteor and other machines on endurance runs primarily using the circular track. After Jenkins, others such as Goldie Gardner, Sir John Cobb, Captain George Eyston, Mickey Thompson and Art Arfons came to the Salt Flats to set speed records. Craig Breedlove became the first person to pass the 400, 500 and 600 mile per hour barriers in a land vehicle from 1963 to 1965 in his rocket car "The Spirit of America". In 1970, Gary Gabelich set a world land speed record of 622.4 mph in the "Blue Flame," surpassed in 1979 by Bill Fredrick with a controversial record of 638.637 mph.

The Bonneville Salt Flats' internationally-famous speedway is nine miles long and only 80 feet wide; it is just a small part of the 30,000 acres of salt flats managed by BLM.

While Tetzleff was discovering the world's best speedway, linemen were busy erecting the first transcontinental telephone line. The line ran across the salt desert roughly paralleling present highways and was officially opened in 1915. The final connection was made at the state line at Wendover. In the 1970s a modern, underground, transcontinental coaxial cable system with the capacity of some 200,000 lines was completed. Its course across northwestern Utah roughly parallels portions of the old transcontinental railroad.

GREAT
SALT
LAKE
UTAH GENERAL DEPOT
HILL
AIR FORCE
BASE
NAVAL SUPPLY DEPOT
HILL A.F.B.
BOMBING AND
GUNNERY
RANGE
Wendover
Kearns
WENDOVER BOMBING
AND
GUNNERY RANGE
TOOELE
ARMY
DEPOT
CAMP WILLIAMS
DUGWAY
PROVING
GROUND
N.
10 5 0 10 20 30 40
SCALE OF MILES

MILITARY ACTIVITY

Except for potash development on the Bonneville Salt Flats, the First World War had little impact upon the barrier lands of northwestern Utah. However, World War II brought the greatest conquerors in Utah's barrier land history.

During these years military installations at Clearfield, Hill Field, Ogden, Tooele, Kearns and Wendover were established and huge tracts of salt desert were appropriated for bombing and gunnery ranges. Most of these installations endure today.

However, perhaps the most historically significant of all – Wendover Air Force Base – stands as a military ghost town. Once this base was the center of the nation's largest military reserve. It was here in 1945, when almost 20,000 personnel were on the base, that the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were secretly assembled, loaded upon their planes and sent upon their world-changing journeys.

TRAVELING THE BARRIER LANDS TODAY

Today, thousands pass through this barrier land each year, but few have knowledge of either the great human events which have occured there or the challenges this unique land has posed to man.

While the land, being one of the world's natural wonders, is interesting in itself, the human activities unfolded on its stage are more so. As you travel through the barrier lands to re-live your chosen saga, please note the following travel advice because those who travel this land unprepared do so at great risk.

Come prepared for desert travel. Bring extra gas and water, fan belts and oil. Be sure your vehicle is in very good condition, especially your tires. No services are available for great distances in the region.

Use appropriate vehicles for the terrain and keep them on safe, existing roads. Salt, sand and mud often look deceptively solid when, in fact, they may not support a vehicle.

Remember that desert terrain is deceptive in distance and orientation. Avoid getting lost by remembering distances and landmarks. If you do get lost, stay with your vehicle and avoid heat exhaustion. Get good maps and study your route before traveling.

This is your land; please help keep it uncluttered. Take all refuse with you and dispose of it properly.

Respect the rights and property of others.

Be careful.

During thunderstorm seasons, watch out for flash floods and washed out roads.

Remember, also, that the priceless cultural resources which make travel in this land so interesting are protected by both federal and state laws and need to be preserved. Any persons caught unlawfully taking, injuring, excavating or destroying any object of antiquity will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Please protect these treasures for others to appreciate.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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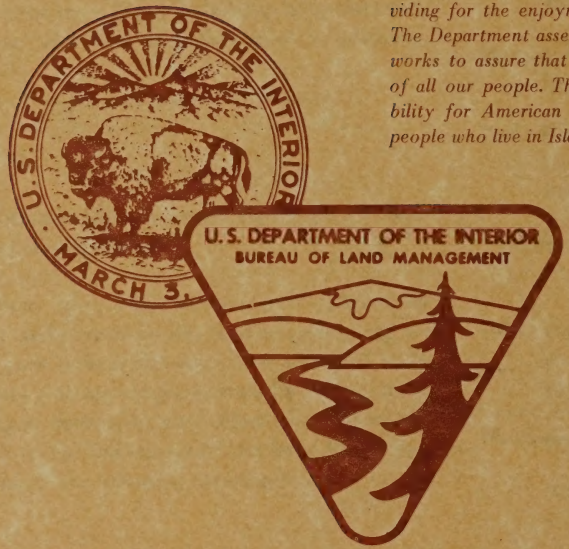
The Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.



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